

MRIP Transition Team: Atlantic and Gulf Subgroup

FINAL Summary

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After the December 12, 2014, conference call, two tables outlining the pros and cons of a one year versus multi-year benchmarking of the two surveys were compiled and presented to the Team. The reason for two tables was to capture discussion on 1) the number of years to benchmark and 2) once you have the benchmark done and can calibrate, what are the pros and cons of getting as many stock assessments done in one year rather than fitting into the normal assessment schedule. The two tables are interchangeable in different ways – hence some overlap between them.

The group agreed that the tables were beneficial to the discussion for the call and moving forward with a decision. It was suggested that a third aspect to consider is how a one versus multi-year approach may affect the externalities of the Councils and Commissions.

After reviewing the tables, the first topic discussed was *Will NMFS need to report the results of the side by side comparisons, and if so, at what points in time should they be shared with the public?*

Dave Van Voorhees proposed an approach that would allow for scheduled ‘decision points’ throughout the benchmarking period. He suggested that summary reports of the data for each decision point could be prepared for the Team. The group agreed that reports would be the best way to convey and review the information. Van Voorhees proposed at least two decision points for consideration: 1) after Wave 4 (preliminary data in report) and 2) mid-April the following year of side-by-side (finalized data in report). Additionally, once the reports are viewed by the Team, they could be made public (on the MRIP website) for transparency in how decisions are being made through out the benchmarking process. Overall, the group approved the approach of receiving reports for review, as well as the proposed decision points – potentially adding more with further discussion. It was also agreed that side-by-side estimates should not be made public for each wave, and that reports should suffice.

In regard to making decisions after one year of side-by-side, the majority of the group still believed this may not be a sufficient amount of time. It was noted that if final estimates are not produced until mid-April of the following year, that making final decisions based on one year of benchmarking would not be enough. However, it was pointed out that even if you utilize information from one year, the idea is to not only do one year of benchmarking and then stop; but that there is the expectation that a second year would be necessary as well. With this, the question is if there is enough value in the first year of data to give confidence of variability and that it is not making the decision whether to continue side-by-side for a second year, but rather to calibrate based on the first year and then modify and fine tune after the second year. It was added that the decision could be made to calibrate from one year to address critical management questions and that the above context of an expected second year for fine tuning was helpful.

One member pointed out that if calibrating the data after one year of side-by-side could negatively impact the stock assessment approach and staff time if multiple assessments have to be redone if the variability

among years is high. Another member added that doing one calibration, versus fine tuning each year, would be desirable and more defensible. Irrespective of the timetable, the first year could be used to start looking at how the new estimates may affect stock assessments and how to get the ball rolling for scheduling assessments, but it was added that there are still reservations in actually using the first year data for assessments/management. Several members agreed that they do not think that most stocks will only require simple modifications, but that it is beneficial to start determining to what extent sooner. Additionally, a discussion between the north and southeast would be useful in looking at how to approach certain issues that could arise.

In terms of one versus multi-year benchmarking, the group discussed the perception of stating in the Transition Plan that we will calibrate after one year and potentially extend as needed, versus stating that we will take multiple years and then potentially shorten the time frame. Stakeholders tend to react better to having expectations exceeded then feel like the government is pushing back or delaying deadlines. The majority of the group agreed it is better to overstate than under.

For stock assessments, it was agreed that if scientists can have a good feel for how the new data will affect the models by the summer of 2016 (after one full year of side-by-side) then preparation for conducting assessments in 2017 will be feasible. It will give head space for doing anticipatory work as well as assembling resources needed at appropriate times; as well as prioritizing and move forward. At this point, there will be approximately one and a half years of side-by-side plus an additional year for the four pilot study states.

Overall, the group came to agreement that having two full years of side-by-side data is the best approach. However, there would still be the possibility that a calibration model could be developed during 2016 – adding the advantage of having this in place when final data is available. The group did not agree on when the Coastal Household Telephone Survey could be ended – after 2017, 2018, or 2019.

How do we best communicate the tradeoffs of taking the necessary time versus responding to outside pressure?

Regarding sharing data with the public and having an extended timeframe, everyone acknowledged that there will be public and political pressure to share information and move forward with the new survey method sooner rather than later. It was pointed out that we need to be able to sufficiently detail why the new survey method is not the best available science until it is thoroughly benchmarked and the time series has been adjusted and the calibration method has been peer reviewed. One member suggested that we will be able to document the variability more accurately with the multi-year approach and not with one year. A second suggestion was stating our ‘lessons learned’ from previous redesign and estimation efforts. Overall, everyone agreed that communicating the reasoning behind an extended benchmarking will be difficult and that a thorough communications strategy is needed. Because the final report and methodology has been approved by the MRIP Executive Steering Committee, who recommended certifying the method to be used in the MRIP ‘toolbox’ as an acceptable approach for estimating recreational fishing effort, there will be no question that MRIP/NMFS will be stating that this is a preferred method. Therefore, it will be key to express through the Transition plan the necessity of not

using the method until the time series is revised and in the same currency. Having a consistent message will be necessary.

Identifying Key Stocks

In the meeting summary from December 12, 2014, a preliminary table listing all of the federally managed stocks was provided to the Team members. Members were asked to provide feedback on the species listed, as well as add state managed stocks to the list that have a significant recreational component. Additionally, a ranking of stocks within each region will need to be provided in order to clearly indicate which species may be most affected when asked. Feedback should be sent to Galen Tromble (galen.tromble@noaa.gov).